

**Montana VR Council
Meeting Minutes
April 29 – May 30, 2008**

Vocational Rehabilitation Council

April 30 – May 1, 2008

Jorgensons Inn

Helena, Montana

Members present: Jackie Colombe, Denise Corrao, Nina Cramer, Faith Dawson (Thursday), Andrea Falcon, Dalayna Faught, Mary Hall, Sharla LaFountain (Wednesday), Wayne Nankivel, Ruth Straley, Dick Trerise, Claudette Vance, Lynn Winslow, Mavis Young Bear (Thursday), Ron Mills, Michelle Williamson, Dan Burke, Maureen Kenneally (Wednesday), Christina Mattlin

Members absent: Carol Lambert (excused), Paul Pearson (unexcused)

Staff and guests present: Peggy Williams, Joe Mathews, Bob Jahner, Barb Varnum, Bev Berg, Marilyn Daumiller, Brigitte Winfield

Federal staff present on Thursday: Yann Yann Shieh, Larry Vrooman, Tom Kelley (phone), Jackie Stuckey, Dave Wachter, Janette Shell

Wednesday, April 30

Dick Trerise called the meeting to order at 10:00. After a quick review of the Council's mission and values, the January minutes were approved. No one participated in the public comment period.

Peggy passed out a copy of the VR Council budget, also known as the "resource plan". Because of large travel distances and the need to have overnight meetings, the budget is about \$34,000 in 2008.

Update from CSAVR (Council of State Administrators of VR)—Jackie Colombe

Jackie talked about the national SRC (State Rehabilitation Council) meeting in Washington DC. The meeting had a positive tone, and RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration—our federal agency) supports the national SRC organization. The Montana VR Council is not a typical SRC—we have a great relationship with the VR agency. Jackie met for about 10 minutes each with Senators Baucus and Tester and found them to be very supportive of the VR program.

State and national update—Joe Mathews

Five people from RSA are in Montana to review the VR program. They are looking at the state plan, strategic plan, transitions activities, veteran services, community rehabilitation programs, and assistive technology program. Four of them visited Missoula, and one visited Great Falls. They will be reviewing Montana every four years, and they will write up a report of their findings.

Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act (federal enabling legislation) will not happen again this year. Typically Congress reauthorizes the law every 5 years, but the last reauthorization was in 1998.

Transition from school to work is one area that RSA (Rehabilitation Services Administration) is emphasizing. Another area of interest to RSA is veterans returning from war. The Veterans' Administration is having a hard time keeping up, and some post traumatic stress disabilities don't show up right away. Although Montana VR has not seen many veterans so far, they expect to in the coming years.

Montana's federal grant went down this year, because of the federal allotment formula. When a state enjoys good economic times, the federal grant sometimes decreases. However, RSA allows states to apply for "reallotment funds"---the money that other states can't spend. Because its grant decreased, Montana will be a priority for these reallotment funds.

The federal government is phasing out the RCEPS (Rehabilitation Continuing Education Programs) and replacing them with TACE (Technical Assistance and Continuing Education) centers. RSA will control the TACE centers more strongly.

On the state side, VR is working on its budget requests for the next biennium in the EPP (Executive Planning Process). VR has requested funding for:

- Caseload growth for extended employment and independent living
- Provider rate increase (2% per year)
- Tuition increase for colleges and universities
- Additional funding for vending equipment for the Business Enterprise Program (BEP)
- Transitions

The requests have been sent to the Department of Public Health and Human Services director, who now prioritizes them with the rest of the department. They then will be reviewed by the Governor's budget office.

The All Staff meeting went well. Dick Trerise talked about the Council's values and support of the VR program, and Denise Corrao presented on tips for helping consumers with mental illness. The staff also heard presentations on grieving, veterans needs, and personality disorders.

Bob Jahner is retiring in July, and Joe will fill his position soon. Joe has asked Ruth Straley to be on the interview team.

Proposed procedures—Bob Jahner

Bob talked about his initial draft procedure regarding service worker harassment. VR may suspend a consumer's services if the consumer maintains a sustained campaign of intimidation, personal insult or harassment against a VR staff person. The Council agreed with the concept and provided some wording changes. Bob also reviewed the graduate school policy for VR consumers.

Committee reports

Committee reports are included as Attachments A, B, and C.

The Council voted to accept the three nominations for business awards suggested by the Public Relations Committee: Safeway of Helena, Target of Missoula, and Guillios in Boulder.

Federal reports and strategic plan evaluation—Peggy Williams

Peggy discussed the strategic plan quarterly evaluation (see Attachment D). She also reviewed all the reports that VR submits to the federal government including:

- RSA 2—VR Services and Costs
- RSA 113—Caseload Report
- VR Data
- SF269—Financial Report
- RSA 722—Client Appeals and Hearings
- RSA 70B—Older Blind Report
- RSA 704—Independent Living

Business Enterprise Program—Bev Berg

The Randolph-Sheppard Law was enacted in 1936 to provide employment opportunities for blind veterans because of the limited opportunities available for them. Montana passed a Business Enterprise Law (BEP) in 1981, but the program was in existence prior to 1977. The BEP program became dormant in 1987. In 1996 the Montana Association for the Blind requested the program be started again. A feasibility study was conducted from 1999 to 2001 and indicated the program could be successful in providing employment for blind vendors with vending routes and would be self-sustaining in three years. RS/BLVS initiated a contract with Montana Business Enterprises Inc. to start and run the Business Enterprise Program in October, 2001. The program was to consist of vending machine routes only and the vendors would be employees with profit-sharing. This model proved to not work well and was changed to an entrepreneur model in 2006. Also in 2006 a routine audit of MBEI showed that MBEI was in compliance with the majority of the contract, but suggested some contract and reporting changes.

Blind and Low Vision Services' concerns about the program include (1) continuing costs and needs of the program, (2) meeting the needs of vendors for routes that provide opportunity for decent income (\$25,000 per year), (3) services to vendors: monitoring, training, insurance/retirement opportunities, technical assistance, (4) recruiting qualified vendors interested in the vending business, (5) financial stability and viability of the program and non-profit organization, (6) growth – getting current routes/sites to at least minimal income opportunity levels, initiating new routes, (7) contract ends September 30, 2008, (8) dollars spent vs. outcomes (served 15 vendors since instituted and there are currently 4 vendors and 1 actively interested vendor without a route). Council members expressed concerns about the model of administering the contract as not being very efficient, need for improvement of the program, and regarding the structure and financing for the vendors. Suggestions included having an administrative assistant do the book work with an accountant checking it monthly, getting RSVP to provide volunteers for training vendors, and including performance measurements in the contract.

State plan—response to public comment—Barb Varum

Barb reviewed the comments from the public hearing on March 5. VR responded to each comment. This response is Attachment E.

Agenda items for next meeting (July 14 – 15)

Preliminary federal review report
Personnel update (Bob Jahner's replacement)
SRC training in St. Louis
Consumer satisfaction survey

Demo of accessible voting machines
Transitions powerpoint

Thursday, May 1

The VR Council met with the Statewide Independent Living Council. Bob reported on the Governor's Task Force on Transitions meeting that he attended Wednesday afternoon. The purpose of the group is to coordinate transition activities among the many state agency players.

The federal representatives presented information on VR statistics and budget. The two councils then split apart so each could discuss their issues with some of the federal representatives. Jeanette met with the VR Council and discussed general VR issues.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30.

Attachment A
Transitions Committee Minutes
April 30, 2008

The committee reviewed the minutes from the January 25th meeting for those members who were not present at the previous meeting and to refresh the memories of those who were.

The primary discussion of the committee revolved around the information the committee hoped to gather from Barb Schiedermayer as her position as Transitions Counselor in the Missoula District evolved. As measures become available as to the progress being made in the area of transitions outcomes (by virtue of more personalized services to youth with disabilities), the committee will determine it's support of furthering this model of service to other parts of the State.

The only other topic of notable discussion was to request that Barb Schiedermayer's orientation to VR and Transitions power point be presented at the next VR Council meeting. This power point will allow the larger council to view the public relations efforts being made to educate students, educators, and parents about available VR services across the State.

Attachment B
Public Relations Committee Minutes
April 30, 2008

Present: Maureen, Barb V., Claudette, Dalayna,, Jackie, Wayne, Denise, Peggy, Nina, Ruth

1. Update on PR video

Jackie met with the Butte VR office to discuss the 60 second and 30 second Public Service Announcements that she is producing. They have identified a consumer and looked at other PSAs. Jackie would like the staff to be in the PSA. She's meeting with the staff on Monday (5/5/08) to nail down the concept.

2. Council awards

Maureen will draft the press release, and it will be reviewed by the other committee members. Instead of a certificate, we will make a plaque for the award recipient. The wording will be similar to "The State of Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council recognizes *** for their ongoing commitment for hiring people with disabilities".

The press release will contain more details on what the business is being recognized for.

We will present 3 awards this quarter: Safeway of Helena (nominated by Ruth), Target of Missoula (nominated by Dalayna), Guillios of Boulder (nominated by Jackie). We will present two awards after the July meeting: Albertsons in Miles City(nominated by Denise) and Penco (nominated by Claudette).

We will call the local paper to let them know when we are presenting the award. Maureen suggested not putting a date on the plaque.

Native American Committee Minutes
April 30, 2008

The Native American Committee will be setting new goals at its next meeting. We will be concentrating more on urban Native Americans now.

Montana VR Strategic Plan *Evaluation--March 2008*

Color Coding:

Teal—Evaluation 1/2008

Green—Evaluation 3/2008

1. Successfully assist people with disabilities to achieve their employment goals.

- Continue to meet the standards and indicators, our federal report card.

Central: Montana VR met all the federal standards and indicators for FY 2007.

- Continue achieving high consumer satisfaction feedback by meeting or exceeding 85% on consumer survey question #10, "In an overall general sense, how satisfied are you with the services you received?"

Central: The VR numbers have not yet been calculated, but the IL question, "I am satisfied with the services from IL", had an 86.8% positive response rate. On 2/27/08, the survey data was sent to Alan Davis for his analysis.

- Refine our methods to identify unserved and underserved populations and how to serve them. Evaluate methods over the next three years on developing ways to measure unserved and underserved.

IL: Both IL and VR are concerned about identifying unserved and underserved populations. IL looked at youth with disabilities, Native Americans with disabilities, and Montanans with disabilities residing in rural counties. The 2007 data is as follows:

Youth with disabilities (% of Montanans with disabilities) age 16 – 20, 2000 census = 1.7%
Youth (18 – 22) Percent of IL cases served by Montana IL Centers = 5.5%

Native Americans with Disabilities (% of Montanans with disabilities based on a disability rate of 30% in the NA population) 2000 census = 15%

Native American percent of IL cases served by Montana IL Centers = 18.1%

Montanans with disabilities residing in counties with less than 6 persons per square mile (% of total Montanans with disabilities) 2000 census = 33.3%

Consumers residing in counties with less than 6 persons per square mile (% of cases served by IL centers) = 33.8%

- Make available a list of qualified benefits planners.

Billings: We have created a benefits planner list and introductory statement

Butte: A list of qualified benefits planners has been made available to all counselors.

Great Falls: We have a list of statewide benefits planners that are available to our customers. We routinely provide printed literature on services available through the Montana Center on Disabilities and North Central Independent Living Services. Our customers are advised of this service at intake and throughout the VR process. This resource has proven to be extremely valuable when it comes to educating customers about the effects of employment on Social Security benefits.

Missoula: Flo Kiewel with Summit ILC in the Flathead is a qualified benefits planner. New staff in the Missoula and Hamilton offices of Summit will be trained in the next few months. Deb Conwell of the WORC Center is self trained and has worked closely with local Social Security staff for several years. Annmarie Chambers who formerly completed PASS plans

and benefits analysis has returned to offer that service. Flo continues to be the only “qualified” benefits planner.

BLV: BLV uses the same disability planners as the other regional offices. All the counselors have a list of the disability planners in their regions.

- Offer referral to benefit planners (CWICs) at intake to new SSI and SSDI clients.

Billings: The benefits planning list and introductory statement are included in each new applicant package and are reviewed with SSA applicants.

Butte: All counselors have begun offering benefits planning to referred or active Social Security recipients.

Great Falls: Information on benefit planning services available to Social Security recipients is provided at weekly MVR informational meetings. The general information which is provided at our group meetings is followed up with more detailed information at the initial meeting with the counselor. Providing information about the service has become one of our standard office procedures. The benefit of accessing this information early in the MVR process is clear and it is something we will continue to do on an ongoing basis.

Missoula: In Missoula and Mineral counties, we are encouraging case managers of consumers in the mental health system to facilitate benefits analysis prior to referral to VR. Counselors find that providing this at intake is too much for consumers to understand. It is a conversation that happens at later appointments as employment plans are being discussed.

- Increase the percentage of rehabilitated consumers who have health insurance at closure. The 2006 percentage of rehabs with health insurance through their employment was 26.1%. The 2006 percentage of rehabs with any kind of health insurance (including Medicaid and Medicare) was 69.5%.

Central: In 2007, 239 out of 912 (26.2%) rehabs had insurance through their employer. The 2007 percentage of rehabs with any kind of health insurance (including Medicaid and Medicare) was 70.9% (647 out of 912).

Great Falls: Our region has provided counselors with training on how to accurately code successful MVR closures. Customers who are employed in jobs where medical coverage is available at the end of a probationary period should be listed as having insurance and other benefits at MVR case closure.

- Have CRP liaisons find out from placement specialists what the need, availability, and use of soft skills training is in their region. Also have the workforce liaisons investigate this.

Billings: During a regional staff meeting, we thoroughly reviewed where soft skills training classes are offered in the Billings region.

Butte: Soft skills trainers have been identified in the region, and counselors have been given information regarding soft skills in each office.

Great Falls: We gathered information from local One Stop Centers on training availability. We receive monthly fliers and e-mail distributions regarding the various soft skills training available. We are utilizing "Soft Skills Training" which is currently available in our region. Our regional Workforce Centers do an excellent job of making this type of training available to our mutual customers. We believe this need is being met and no further work will be done on this particular objective. (Completed)

Missoula: This is in progress.

BLV: This is in progress—again, BLV uses the same trainers as other regions.

- Train consumers in transportation options by asking the independent living centers to present travel training at each regional office every two years.

Billings: During a regional staff meeting, Independent Living (LIFTT) presented training on and we discussed transportation options in the Billings region. Both VR and LIFTT have representation on and participate in Transportation Advisory Councils (TACs).

Great Falls: The regional administrator regularly participates in Transportation Advisory Council meetings. Information obtained is brought back to regional staff. Our staff will continue to participate in our local TAC meetings. North Central Independent Living Services has been invited to make a presentation on transportation and "travel training" during a May staff meeting.

Missoula: The counselor supervisor, Mark Cumming, has attended community meetings regarding transportation issues and plans for the future.

BLV: Orientation and Mobility Specialists provide training to consumers in the use of alternative transportation options.

- Provide more access regarding new and emerging technologies by providing training at statewide events such as the annual All Staff meeting. Sources of training could be PLUK and the Rural Institute.

Billings: The Billings region is working on a pilot project for using video-phones or Polycom internet based audio and video cam technology for attending IEP meetings and providing training in rural schools. In this endeavor, expertise and advice is being sought from PLUK, MSU-B, CSPD, and SummitNet.

BLV: BLV hired an assistive technology specialist this fall. Paul Suptic is pursuing training on the adaptive software and hardware for people with visual impairments. He will attend two workshops by Freedom Scientific in January. After this training, he will schedule a workshop for hands-on JAWS training for consumers and BLV staff. He will invite MonTech and MSDB staff as well. Paul completed the scripting and other training in adaptive software, and he attended the CSUN conference. He will set up training and provide information about new technologies at the BLV spring staff meeting.

Central: Brigitte Winfield, Bob Jahner, and Barb Varnum met with Kathy Laurin from MonTech to discuss expanded training and access to new and emerging technologies. We are planning for staff training this summer, and will discuss it more in the March and May RA meetings.

2. Assure that consistent, high quality transition services are made available statewide

- Continue identifying and communicating with students with disabilities in schools.

Butte: 01-16-2008 - All counselors and BLVS staff presented at, "Graduating Seniors Transition Career Expo". Approximately 300 seniors from Butte and surrounding areas were at this Expo.

Billings: We have distributed posters to schools as we have had contact with counselors, teachers and administrators. Some presentations have been given to individual high school classes. The most recent was to the high school in Huntley.

Great Falls: All counselors in the Great Falls region are actively involved in transition activities. Counselors understand the importance of "transition activities" and are aggressively working with school personnel and students on improving this process. We are giving informational presentations to schools in all of our "travel areas", and here in Great Falls there has been an increase in the frequency that school personnel visit our office. All of our counselors keep a log of their school presentations and transition activities. We are making excellent progress in this area.

Missoula: Staff participate in transition fairs (parents, teachers and students) and attend IEPs either in person or by phone. The transitions counselor, Barb Schiedermayer, has weekly hours in three Missoula schools. The Hamilton VR counselor attended two transition events. Barb also made a web presentation on transitions sponsored by the Rural Institute.

Central: The Legislature approved funding for a transitions counselor, and that position has been hired in Missoula. On January 7, a web conference was held: "Montana VR—Navigating the Transition from School to Work". VR is also helping sponsor a transitions conference in September in Great Falls: "Transition to What?" Five VR staff will attend training in January 2008 on "Facilitating Successful Transitions for Youth and Young Adults with

Brain Injury". VR administrative staff are engaged in the Governor's Transition Task Force and are working on the systems issues of transitions.

BLV: The BLV counselors in all regions have contact with the MSDB outreach workers and actively contact schools to let them know BLV is available for transitioning students with visual impairments. BLV participates in activities with parents and students attending MSDB in the vision unit to work on transition.

- Continue updating and maintaining VR liaisons with schools and the school contact list for transitions.

Butte: Has updated the list.

Billings: This has been done.

Great Falls: The list of liaison contacts in our region has been updated. This list, which is on our website, accurately reflects the counselors responsible for individual schools.

Missoula: This has been done.

- Continue relationships with OPI, PLUK, and MYLF.

Billings: A Billings counselor participated in the MYLF summer event. Counselors have talked about MYLF in their liaison schools.

Butte: Some counselors have participated in MYLF.

Great Falls: Some counselors have participated in MYLF. Our staff has been proactive in distributing MYLF applications to interested customers, students, and school personnel.

Missoula: A Missoula counselor participated in MYLF. A Missoula counselor serves on the MYLF advisory board and our transitions counselor is very involved with all players in the field of transitions (Governor's Transitions Committee, MYLF, Rural Institute, Missoula high schools).

Central: Joe and Bob have biweekly teleconferences with MYLF to coordinate activities.

IL: IL centers have staff that work at MYLF each year. Last year staff from two centers worked at the forum as other center staff coordinated evening activities. PLUK and the IL centers were included in a transition grant proposal developed by central office. The proposal was not successful.

- Continue to explore video conferencing for transition services.

Billings: We are continuing to explore this in the Billings region. We have found that the schools have lower access to technology than was originally thought. We are in the process of purchasing video conferencing equipment suitable for work with Polycom systems such as those used by SummitNet, OPI and universities.

Great Falls: This is a work in progress. We do have video conferencing capabilities in the Great Falls office which are used to communicate with our customers who are deaf. Two different devices are available. There have been issues with compatibility of service which we are attempting to resolve.

Missoula: We attempted to participate in an IEP in Eureka via video but the school system was not operating correctly. Staff in the Kalispell office will continue to explore the use of video equipment.

- Determine how many high school students we are serving, not serving, and who and where they are.

Great Falls: When counselors visit their individual schools, they provide information on program eligibility criteria. This education assists in identifying potentially eligible transitioning students who have not been considered for VR services.

Missoula: Marvalee and the transitions counselor are gathering data on how many students we served last year and how many we are serving this year with a counselor in the schools.

Central: Mike has identified statistics on the OPI website showing the number of special ed students by disability in Montana. Note: Not all special ed students will be eligible for VR services, and VR serves students with disabilities who are not listed under special ed (504 students).

- Develop a public relation (PR) plan to reach students with disabilities, parents, school staff, and community agencies on transition services.

Billings: We are targeting each school and have begun by using posters and training.

Butte: Meetings have been held with all schools. Posters are being developed for distribution to schools as well as businesses.

Butte: Posters are at the printers and will be distributed to schools when completed as well as businesses and physician offices.

02/13/08 - An article was placed in the Anaconda Leader regarding MVR and transitioning students at the Anaconda Senior High School.

Great Falls: All of our counselors are working diligently to contact students who could benefit from MVR services during transition from school to work. Our greatest challenge is in schools along the "Highline Area." Our counselor in Havre has done an excellent job of disseminating program information. She is working with school personnel to develop referral strategies that will ensure students access to VR services, even when it is not feasible for regular personal contact. She has found that communication and utilizing technology is the key.

Missoula: Counselors in the Kalispell office and Hamilton office continue to attend IEPs. Missoula counselors and regional administrator attend IEPs when possible. In January the transitions counselor began having regular weekly hours in each of the three public high schools in Missoula. She made a web presentation on transitions in early February; the audience included parents, agency representatives, and teachers.

Central: Each year at MYLF counselors from each region attend and are allowed time to meet with delegates from their area to discuss VR. Also each year Joe Mathews gives a presentation.

- Invite a school representative to discuss transitions in each region.

Great Falls: Great Falls school district personnel from both Great Falls HS and CM Russell HS have been in our office during December to discuss current transition policies and procedures with our designated liaisons. Our counselor supervisor has also been part of those discussions. (Completed)

Missoula: The transition counselor will conduct a meeting (preferring to call it a "retreat") with all high school staff involved in transitions. This has been difficult to coordinate.

- Explore transition programs in other states.

Missoula: The transitions counselor has attended national meetings and has met with leaders in the transitions effort. The Rural Institute staff keep VR counselors informed about transitions trainings and news. The Rural Institute has transferred some of its funding directly to a CRP (JOBS) to provide job readiness training and work experience/direct job placement to high school consumers. Barb Schiedermayer works directly with many of these consumers and cost shares with some.

- Hire a transition counselor/program officer to directly serve consumers and to develop transition practices. Determine if transition referrals increase.

Missoula: The Legislature appropriated funding for a transitions counselor which was hired for the Missoula region. She is working with the VR data person to determine the impact of this position on referrals to the VR program. Data will be available after June 30.

- Create a strategy for improved access in schools.

Billings: We are now emphasizing the use of written referrals and the use of a generic referral form. In this way, when schools refer a student, the information might be able to be tracked and a written response would be received by the school.

Great Falls: At regional staff meetings, we have explored ways to improve our referral process. Our counselor in Havre is working with schools along the Highline to improve the way that students are transitioned to VR services.

- Develop urban and rural models of transition services.

- Serve 20 high school students through MYLF.

Great Falls: Our staff has made a concerted effort to ensure that MYLF information and application forms are available for interested students and school personnel. These efforts should pay off with additional participation.

Missoula: Counselors present MYLF information to students, parents, and teachers. Chanda (Kalispell) also makes presentations with Summit IL staff.

- Coordinate annually with disability services offices at university level (regional level).

Billings: We coordinate regularly with the disability services offices at MSU-Billings and the schools in Miles City and Glendive. Usually this coordination is on a per student basis as issues arise.

Butte: Butte counselors meet regularly with Disability Services representatives at the various universities in the region.

Great Falls: We coordinate regularly with Disability Service offices at MSU College of Technology, the University of Great Falls, and MSU Northern. This past year, we attended the annual meeting of disability services coordinators which was held in Great Falls. In this quarter, we have made formal presentations on MVR services at MSU COT and at the University of Great Falls. These presentations were made by our Regional Liaisons to staff at the respective schools. We have also found that participation in CMT meetings improves collaboration.

Missoula: This is done on a case by case basis. There will be a meeting with disability services to discuss how the financial aid level is determined. We met with University of Montana staff in the business office, financial aid, student services, career services, and medical withdrawal offices. There has been confusion with financial aid and business offices and the other areas were more for awareness of their resources for students. A counselor with experience working in the student services area of a community college will be our UM liaison and will work with UM to develop better contact strategies. The transitions counselor will participate in the University of Montana Transition to College three day workshop in June. Missoula counselors met with various UM staff to explore services and later developed a checklist of contacts to be accomplished prior to starting classes.

BLV: Counselors coordinate with the Disability Services at the post secondary schools where consumers are attending.

Central: Ellen Swaney of OCHI is on the Governor's Task Force. We will coordinate through this connection. We are discussing the idea of creating a model process for all schools.

3. Build awareness and understanding of VR services

- Educate legislators, consumers, and the general public on VR services by sending out quarterly updates through the Friends of Rehab email list.

Central: VR sent the following items to its "Friends of Rehab" mailing list: (1) update on the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (August 17, 2007); (2) link to web page of VR state plan and IL state plan (October 17, 2007); (3) copy of the VR Council Governor's Report (January 4, 2008); (4) information on the upcoming public hearing; (5) short update on the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant. Legislators sit on the VR Council and the SILC.

- Explore the potential of TV/radio ads, maybe collaborating with MTAP.

Butte: We have been exploring the possibility of having a senior or graduate student at Montana Tech develop a public relations campaign for the region. We are waiting for the program director to contact us.

Butte: The Butte office in coordination with MVR council member are developing a 30 – 60 second TV/radio PR spot.

- Invite at least one business in each region to do a presentation at a staff meeting.

Billings: Dwight Vigness, Human Resources Director of Yellowstone County spoke to the office on November 8. Issues covered included: use of handicapped preference, jobs available through counties, jobs that are hard to fill and ones that have more qualified applicants.

Butte: We met with the director of Kids Management Authority to discuss their program and to determine how we can help the underserved kids who are helped by that organization.

Great Falls: We have a close working relationship with Cable Technologies Inc. This company has employed many VR customers. The individuals that have gone to work with this company include many people with varying disabilities. We currently have four customers who are deaf and working as assembly technicians. The president of this company and the human resources director have been in our office to discuss employment opportunities with their company. Our staff have toured their facility. We have continued to work closely with Cable Technologies Inc. The partnership that has developed between this employer, our agency and MSU College of Technology has resulted in significant employment opportunities for our customers. Our staff understands the importance of "reaching out" to employers in our area and developing a strong working relationship.

Missoula: We have not had individual employers attend staff meetings this quarter, but staff are kept informed of employment trends based on information obtained at Job Service Employment Council (JSEC) meetings and Community Management Team (CMT) meetings. Staff feel a need for updated information from other service providers.

- Expand career fair activity in more communities (as an employer and consumer resource).

Billings: We participate in almost every job and health fair. For example, we participated in the health fair in Glendive, the job fair in Miles City, the Jobs Jamboree/fair in Billings, the Senior Health Fair in Billings, etc. During the next few weeks we will be participating in "Project Homeless" a career and service fair targeting homeless in the Billings area. We continue to participate in career fairs like the upcoming fair in Billings that usually has about 100 participating businesses.

Butte: We participate in all career fairs, health fairs, and job fairs.

Butte: Career Fair presentations in Butte (03/04/2008). In Helena (04/02/2008).

Great Falls: We are currently looking for ways to increase our participation in career fairs across our region. During the month of October we did take part in an employer fair in Lewistown. This event was jointly sponsored by the Lewistown Chamber of Commerce and the HRDC.

Missoula: Both the Kalispell and Missoula offices have participated in the past and anticipate doing so again this year. A career fair jointly sponsored by the Missoula and Hamilton JSECs (Job Service Employer Councils) will be held at the Florence-Carlton school in March. The regional administrator continues to serve on the Missoula JSEC. VR participated in the Hamilton Job Fair in late March. The Kalispell VR office will have a booth at the Flathead Career Fair in April.

BLV: BLV counselors, rehabilitation teachers, and orientation and mobility specialists participate in health and job fairs on a regular basis.

4. Develop opportunities for better jobs and on-the-job supports for people who are working.

- Inventory methods of supporting consumers on the job following supported employment closures.

Central: The regional administrators discussed this at their March meeting and came up with the following methods: (1) EE paying job coach on job site; (2) MH case manager can be on or off site; (3) DD provider; (4) private pay to CRP (CRP is signoff)—could be SS or PASS; (5) natural supports; (6) Medicaid (signatures from CRP and Medicaid).

- Expand resources for Extended Employment program by asking the Legislature for more funding.

Missoula: A new EE service provider, Winds of Change, has agreed to provide extended services and provide the long term signoff for eligible consumers of Winds of Change.

Central: On 2/22/08, Reg Gibbs sent information regarding the EE waiting list. VR will request more money for EE funding during the EPP process.

- Study and explore post-BA eligibility and educational opportunities.

Central: Bob Jahner, Faith Dawson, Dan Burke, and Janet Van Dyke have developed a model of decision making for the April VR Council meeting.

- Invite the National Business Network to present at the 2008 All Staff meeting.

Missoula: Consider the WorkSource Wisconsin program also

Central: We discussed an invitation to the national Business Network to present at the 2008 All Staff, and we decided against it as Montana does not have the large national employers typical of partnerships with the network. Brigitte is seeking a speaker to present on “What are employers really looking for and how can we fill the need?”

5. Enhance VR services specifically for people with mental illness, brain injuries, and learning disorders

- Require each region have a focus group on mental health issues.

Billings: This is in the planning stage. This has not been held yet. At this time, however, we are participating in the mental health advisory council and we are setting up having a counselor out-stationed for a short time each two weeks at the HUB (a mental health drop in treatment and support facility in Billings).

Butte: We will invite mental health consumers to explain their needs and tell their stories at our focus forum.

Great Falls: We are working with our mental health center liaison to plan this year’s focus group discussion. We will have our Regional Focus Group meeting on May 7, 2008. The discussion will be facilitated by our Regional Liaison for Mental Health Services, Pete Townsend. The subject for discussion will be, "Improving Job Training Opportunities for MVR Customers with Mental Illness."

Missoula: The PACT vocational person attended a staff meeting to discuss and refine the referral process. We discussed and refined a more specific referral process.

BLV: This is in the planning stage.

- Get baseline information on how we serve consumers with mental illness, brain injuries and learning disorders: #26s; wage at closure; service rate, geographic areas. Develop a strategy to address areas of weakness.

Central: We have obtained the baseline information for individuals with psychosocial impairments, brain injuries, and learning disabilities by region. Listed below is the summary:

Standard	1	2	3
	Received Services (26 + 28)	26 Count	Rehab Rate (Column 2/1)
Psychosocial Impairments – code 18	334	182	54.49
Traumatic Brain Injury – code 37	48	26	54.17

Learning Disabilities – code 34	113	72	63.72
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IL: The IL centers are serving consumers with cognitive and mental/emotional disabilities as follows:

Disability	Percent of Caseload with this Disability			
	MILP	NCILS	Summit	LIFTT
Cognitive	25.7%	16.1%	11.3%	15.5%
Mental/emotional	10.7%	4.9%	12.8%	17.7%

- Encourage one counselor from each region to attend the NAMI (National Association of Mentally Ill) conference each year to help develop “pockets of expertise” within the VR staff.

Billings: We have pocket of expertise counselors participating in the NAMI group and the mental health advisory council.

Butte: A counselor did attend the conference.

Great Falls: We have a designated mental health expert, but that person was unable to attend this year’s conference. However, two other staff did attend the conference, and they shared information with other Great Falls staff. Pete Townsend is our Regional Mental Health liaison and designated "expert." He works closely with staff at the Center for Mental Health to ensure that our agency has effective communication with their various programs. As a result, we work effectively with Case Management, Peer Support, Day Treatment and other components the mental health service delivery system.

Missoula: Four staff attended this conference and reported back to other counselors.

Central: VR continues to provide pockets of expertise with pertinent mental health training. In October, fourteen VR staff from across the state attended the 2007 Montana conference on mental illness, “The Journey of Recovery”.

- Focus one state training event (All Staff or MAR) in 2008 on mental health issues. Find models and bring in representatives from successful programs.

Central: Several speakers presented on the topic of mental health at the 2007 Montana Association for Rehabilitation conference and mental health issues will continue to be addressed at 2008 training events. We will have mental health presentations at the April 2008 All Staff Meeting.

6. Collaborate with other appropriate agencies and 121s to enhance outcomes for consumers.

- Write a letter to the DPHHS director stating how our needs assessment again identified transportation as one of the highest needs our consumers mentioned.
- Stay informed with what is going on with independent living and Montana Transportation Partnerships regarding transportation.

Central: IL and VR held a joint public hearing on March 5.

Missoula: We recently met with Summit Independent Living staff to discuss services and common issues, including transportation. Counselor supervisor, Mark Cumming, attended community input sessions on transportation and economic development, and he presented that information to staff.

Statewide: (2nd Quarter) The Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Program, Rural Institute and Independent Living Centers across the State are working jointly on the "Working Well with a Disability Project." This study may produce a product that will improve health, wellness

and employment outcomes for VR Customers in Montana and across the United States. A secondary byproduct of this project is improved collaboration between the agencies involved.

IL: A report on the activities of the Transportation Partnership is scheduled for each meeting of the SILC.

- Work with 121 projects to determine needs and alignment with VR. Barb will contact the 121s and ask for input regarding the needs on their respective Reservations.

Billings: We are actively advising and coordinating with the Northern Cheyenne 121.

Great Falls: We work with all the 121 Projects. The Blackfeet Manpower Program has recently been certified as the first One Stop Center on a Reservation. We have an excellent working relationship with this center and are seeking ways to increase services that are available to our joint customers. Staff turnover at the Workforce Center in Browning has impacted our ability to increase placement referrals and collaborate on joint cases. We continue to work on improving service delivery in that area. The Counselor in our Havre Office travels to all of the Reservations located in her territory and has developed good working relationships with 121 Project Staff.

Missoula: The counselor serving the Flathead Reservation recently met with staff of the tribal VR program to discuss how both programs can work together more effectively. Barb Varnum presented to Missoula staff on 121s and how we coordinate with them. Chanda (Kalispell) connected by phone.

- Maintain joint training with 121 projects. Barb will continue to notify the 121 projects about training opportunities such as All Staff, MAR conference, CTAT training opportunities, etc. Barb will send the 121 projects any updated information on the MVR counselor manual.

Central: Barb sends the 121s information regarding training opportunities on a regular basis (National Center for the Dissemination of Disability, CTAT training on TBI employment, Pathfinder Associates training on ethics, and the MAR conference. She sent the 121s the MVR policy changes on due process, MVR fee schedule, assessment and graduate training, and case filing procedures on 10/30/07. VR sent information on the All Staff meeting to all the 121s on 2/26/2008.

- Continue good relationships with all the 121s. Barb will visit each Reservation with a 121 project when invited.

Central: This fall, Barb visited Salish Kootenai and Northern Cheyenne. Barb gathered information from the 121s for a "121 Fact Sheet" that includes contact information, eligibility requirements and area served for each of the 121s. This was sent out to the regional VR offices.

BLV: Doug Robinson is teaming with MonTech, MTAP, and the Montana State Library to do a disability services day-long presentation at each reservation in his area. This has already been done at two reservations. BLVS staff in other regional offices will participate at the reservations in their areas.

- Provide technical assistance to the 121s when requested.

Central: In December, Barb visited the Northern Cheyenne 121 Project at their request to provide training regarding the Ticket to Work program.

- Continue participation on federal benefits workshops on Reservations. Barb will attend at least two federal benefits workshops per year on Reservations.

Billings: The Billings region has participated in all federal benefits workshops on Reservations in our area.

Great Falls: We also have made presentations at several federal benefits workshops.

Central: Barb, Scott Tanner and Doug Robinson attended the Browning disability conference in October. Barb and Kathy Ryan attended the Fort Belknap federal benefits workshop in September.

- Inform disability groups about progress being made on Medicaid Infrastructure Grant.

Central: An update on the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant was sent to “Friends of Rehab” on August 17, 2007. Barbara Kriskovich, grant director, will update the VR Council at its January meeting. This is also one of Independent Living’s focus areas from their 2007 symposium.

- Support inclusion of Medicaid Buy-In in the EPP process.

Central: This is one of IL’s top priorities. VR also supports an EPP request.

- Develop or improve the Community Rehab Program (CRP). Barb will convene the CRP liaison group via telephone conference call four times per year to discuss CRP issues and possible solutions. Barb will contact the CRPs regarding what their needs for improvement are in FY 2008.

- Identify and encourage additional CRP participation. The MVR/CRP rates committee will have at least two CRP representatives that serve on the committee. Barb will contact at least two mental health facilities in FY 2008 regarding their interest in becoming a provider for MVR.

Central: Three CRP liaison conference calls have been held so far in SFY 2008: July, September, and October. A letter was sent to all of the CRPs in March regarding the anticipated change to the CARF requirement. Feedback/ comments were encouraged regarding the proposed change. The MVR rates committee has completed their task of revamping the current CRP rate structure, which will be effective July 1. The group will meet one more time in October to assess how it is going, for both CRPs and counselors.

- Participate in employer associations such as Workforce Centers, Community Management Teams, and One-Stops.

Billings: We are part of a One Stop Center, and the Billings VR regional administrator is currently manager of the center. A counselor in Miles City is currently the chairperson of the Southeastern Montana CMT in Miles City.

Butte: All offices are participating with their local CMTs—some on a monthly basis, but most on a quarterly basis.

Great Falls: We have identified liaison responsibilities for all of the One Stop centers located in our region. The regional administrator or the designated counselor regularly attends CMT meetings and sponsored activities.

Missoula: VR is represented on the Missoula, Bitterroot and Flathead CMTs. Janet Van Dyke continues to be involved in the JSEC.

BLV: The Billings BLV regional manager participates in the One Stop Center meetings.

- Establish a liaison with Department of Corrections and become familiar with their programs related to disability.

Butte: We are in constant contact with various programs related to the Department of Corrections such as: START on the Warm Springs campus; WATCH and CONNECTIONS on the Warm Springs campus; NEXIS in Lewistown; the Men and Women’s Center in Butte and Helena.

Missoula: Brook has agreed to be the liaison. We have had difficulty connecting for a meeting.

- Continue inter-agency cooperation with OPI, Higher Education, and other agencies.

Central: We have cooperative agreements with many of these agencies.

- Meet with Job Service to understand their new role.

Billings: The Billings office meets regularly with folks from Job Service and Workforce programs. We have noted and have received training/guidance on new roles of Job Service like navigators and Job Service absorbing all dislocated worker programs. The most recent meeting was a joint meeting of veterans programs including Billings VR staff, VR Job Service reps, VA-VR counselors, and the Upward Bound program (meeting 3-5-2008)

Butte: Has met in all office areas with Job Service through their CMTs (most recent 01/31/2008 in Butte), to discuss new Job Service roles.

Great Falls: We have an excellent working relationship with our Great Falls Workforce Center. Recently we met with their new disability navigator to discuss services which are being provided. We will continue to coordinate services so that more customers can have access to the array of services provided by both agencies. Our counselors have regular contact with staff at Job Service Centers across the region. In an attempt to stay current on services that are offered, we are having the Great Falls Job Service Liaison, Linda Tope, make a presentation at our Staff Meeting on March 28th. We regularly look for opportunities to provide "Cross Training." During the past quarter, staff members from the Great Falls Job Service have attended our weekly "Informational Meetings" and learned about the MVR Program.

Missoula: The Missoula regional administrator met with Missoula Job Service staff and met their new regional manager. The Job Service disability navigator will attend a VR staff meeting in March. We will tour the local Job Service in April.

- Continue participation in local Mental Health advisory councils.

Billings: We have pocket of expertise counselors who participate in the NAMI group and the mental health advisory councils. We continue to participate in the Mental Health Advisory Councils.

Missoula: Staff will attend LACs in Missoula, Kalispell, and Hamilton. The regional administrator attends Western Service Area Authority meetings.

Great Falls: We are participating in LAC's in the region and also a Peer Support Advisory committee.

- Invite other agencies (such as Job Service, Mental Health, DD, OPI) to present at a VR Council meeting.
- Strengthen networking between VR and other agencies. In 2008, work with Mental Health and Job Service. In 2009, work with Veterans Administration and Brain Injury.

Billings: We are working on having a counselor work a portion of time out of a mental health location like the HUB. Billings VR had a joint meeting of Veterans programs including: Billings VR Staff, VA Job Service Reps, VA-VR Counselors and the Upward Bound Program. (meeting of March 5th 2008)

Butte: We have assigned a counselor to be the principle resource person with respect to mental health issues.

Butte: Has designated a specific counselor to be the liaison with Veteran's programs throughout this region; and have identified Veteran's Representatives in all office locations.

Great Falls: Our commitment to establishing formal liaison responsibilities with agencies in our region has paid dividends. We have strengthened our working relationships with both Mental Health and Job Service.

Missoula: We met with the mental health vocational person and a representative of the PACT to discuss the referral process and case coordination. Liaisons in Missoula, Kalispell and Hamilton attend the LAC meetings.

- Arrange for workforce presentations describing living wage and benefits (what's hot and what's not) once a year in each region.

Billings: The Billings region approaches this issue in a variety of ways. In Miles City, the staff regularly receives job announcements and wage information, targeting local employment opportunities. By being in the One Stop Center, Billings office receives information about businesses that are closing and new businesses expecting to open. One Stop Center space (including VR) is frequently used as interview areas by new employers.

Great Falls: We have arranged for Job Service to make a presentation at our weekly staff meeting during the next quarter. (Completed)

Missoula: Through the Missoula CMT, presentations on issues related to the economy, transportation, living wages, childcare, and growth are planned over the next four months. There is a grant opportunity with the College of Technology/Job Service/HRDC/Union/Chamber regarding energy construction training. Workforce presentations have been difficult for counselors to attend, so the regional administrator brings back information. A private meeting may be necessary.

BLV: When possible the BLV counselors attend the presentations at the VR weekly staff meetings.

7. Continue attention to in-service training and meeting CSPD qualifications.

- Continue to provide in-service training to staff so they continue to be qualified.
- Butte: We continue to encourage staff to participate in training, including the recent mental health training in Missoula.
- Great Falls: Our staff continues to take advantage of in-service training opportunities as they arise. We have had counselors participate in several CTAT training sessions. Since we have several new counselors, they are all involved in formal Utah State master's level coursework. This is a significant commitment of staff time. We have three counselors that are pursuing a master's training through Utah State University, as part of their CSPD plan. We have another counselor in Havre who will begin this program shortly. In addition, we have made a commitment to regional training, emphasizing our Case E System and becoming more competent with existing technologies. We received computer training from John Sutherland, Information Systems Specialist, focusing on remote computer access. This training has resulted in VR Counselors being able to access case management data from remote field areas.
- Missoula: We've had in-services with the VA Voc Rehab, frequently used psychologists, Partnership Health, and the Disability Navigator.
- Central: We do an annual needs assessment each fall to determine the training needs of staff.
- Continue to require professional development plans for counselors.
- Central: We do this and review them annually.
- Continue in-service on new counselor training and training to remain current on disability trends.
- Central: MVR Futures developed a new counselor training guide.
- Develop specific training on VR public law and policy for counselors. (Bob J will do this at bi-district).
 - Provide conflict and mediation training for MVR staff including mediation techniques when a counselor has to say no. Also provide training on how to deal with consumers who are in crisis.
 - Provide staff with information on employment trends (demographics, labor market, interagency linkages and changes).
- Billings: We talk about interagency linkages at every staff meeting and participate in "round robin" exchange type training with 20 other CMT agencies and programs.
- Great Falls: Our office receives regular emails and distributions from the workforce centers identifying employment and labor market trends.

Missoula: Staff are invited to attend CMT events and this information is also shared at staff meetings.
Central: Staff have access to information, but may require reminders or best practices training.

- Continue good succession planning program and prepare for upcoming retirements of senior management.

Billings: The Billings region has a practice of “participation by two” when possible. This way, strategic folk learn about giving talks, negotiating relationships and coordinating services on a larger scale.

Great Falls: We have several staff members participating in management training through the state’s Professional Development Center. We also encourage staff to consider application for the Futures group. Two people in our office have taken part in the Futures group. During this quarter, we have had a counselor complete the "Essentials of Management" course through the PDC and also make application to the Futures Group. To assist with succession planning and facilitate a smooth transition, we ask our staff to be involved in tasks which will broaden their knowledge base and exposure. One of our regional goals is to provide as much "cross training" as possible.

Missoula: The regional administrator is currently on Futures; two staff have completed it, and one other staff has applied.

Central: We just began recruiting for the 7th year of MVR Futures. We continue to send staff to “Basics of Management” and the “Emerging Leaders” series

BLV: Staff are encouraged to attend management and supervisory training and apply for membership in the Futures group

- Continue cultural awareness activities including having a VR Council meeting on a Reservation, sending a counselor to CANAR. Look at the needs of urban Native Americans who do not live on a reservation.

Central: The July 2007 VR Council meeting was held on the Blackfeet Reservation. Six staff recently attended cultural diversity training in Helena, and a counselor was scheduled to attend CANAR but was unable to due to medical reasons.

Great Falls: Our counselor in Havre, Kathleen Ryan, has indicated her desire to represent MVR at this year's CANAR Conference. She does work closely with 121 Projects in this region and believes that her participation in this event would be invaluable

- Explore video conferencing for training.

- Develop a forum for sharing best practices among the counselors such as setting up a column in the newsletter.

Billings: We shared best practice information at our regional staff meeting on November 8, 2007. We talk about best practice on individual cases as they are discussed / reviewed in staff meetings

Great Falls: We have established an appointment schedule for counselor "Case Consultations" at our weekly staff meetings. We have found this commitment has paid dividends for all of our staff.

Missoula: We are trying to discuss “hot topics” such as transportation, dental decisions, and new resources at a staff meeting and then have someone write up guidelines and put that information on our share drive.

8. Expand our staff recruitment effort

- Analyze and determine optimal staffing needs considering job placement, transitions, travel, and number of cases.

- Enhance recruitment through expanding internships through Futures, participating in career fairs and making contacts with universities regarding employment opportunities. (Brigitte)

Billings: We have consistently had interns from the rehabilitation counselor training program at MSU-Billings. Last semester, we had two master's degree students who received training and participated in assisting with service provision to a full range of client services. One of our interns from last fall has been hired as a rehabilitation counselor in the Bozeman office.

Great Falls: We make annual presentations to classes at the University of Great Falls. These presentations provide information on the VR program and educate master's level students on opportunities for employment in the field of rehabilitation.

BLV: BLV filled the orientation and mobility specialist position in Butte with a trainee who started in January. She will take online courses, attend training at a blindness rehabilitation center and begin training in a master's degree program in orientation and mobility.

Central: The Futures internship project should be completed by late spring/early summer. Dan Gray is initially making the MSU-Billings contact and then getting back to Brigitte.

- Provide information on VR/BLVS as a career to high school students.

Butte: We have participated in job fairs, youth fairs, and youth awareness days at local schools to bring the awareness of rehabilitation to the public.

Missoula: Kalispell will have a booth at the job fair in April.

- Recruit and hire a Deaf Coordinator in Great Falls.

Great Falls: Bob Ellesch started this job in January 2008!!

More investigation and resources needed (reviewed annually)

- Make more time available between counselors and consumers.

Great Falls: Our staff is working hard to become more efficient in using our new case management system. We have made great strides in this area. The result of these efforts will be to increase the time available for counseling and one-on-one interaction with our customers.

- Provide more financial support for Business Enterprise Program.

BLV: MBEI was provided additional funding in October to assist with meeting past debts on salaries. BLVS is working with MBEI to provide additional assistance for purchase of more vending machines for federal properties on existing routes. Another \$10,000 was added to the contract in February 2008 for the purchase of equipment for vendors.

- Orient school administrators and guidance counselors regarding transitions and VR.

Billings: We work on this regularly. We participate in CSPD for schools in two regions. Billings, for example, is also providing training on services and transitions to schools—the most recent is training through Yellowstone Coop East which serves high schools in the eastern half of Yellowstone County.

Great Falls: This is an ongoing effort. All our counselors do regular education as they work on transition relationships with their individual schools.

Missoula: The Bitterroot Valley has regular transitions meetings on how to move students to adult services, and VR participates.

- Develop a video on orientation for vocational goal development to help consumers understand their role. Watch the consumer satisfaction survey to monitor trends on concerns with goal development.
- Continue development of new materials for consumers. Find websites to help consumers focus on the VR process, including interest/vocational inventories. Refer this strategy to the Futures application package group.

Central: We will discuss this in MVR Futures and specifically how we can use the packet to connect people to internet resources.

- Inform consumers about the VR process and the full array of services

Great Falls: We continue to use weekly informational meetings to educate new customers about VR services and processes. We plan to use and modify existing public relations PowerPoint's for these presentations. This will allow all staff to provide a consistent message regarding the VR program.

- Develop more “natural support” for consumers requiring extended support.
- Train employers in how to accommodate, support, communicate, and supervise employees with brain disorders and other disabilities.
- Develop a three year public relations plan for each region targeting employers.
- Team up with private associations like NAMI to educate the public.
- Emphasize models and use of team case management; collaborate with other agencies, such as mental health case manager.
- Provide counselors training on models of team case management.

***Summary of the March 5, 2008
Public Hearing for
Vocational Rehabilitation and
Independent Living***



***Promoting Work and Independence
for Montanans with Disabilities***

2008 PUBLIC HEARING

The Montana Vocational Rehabilitation (MVR) program and the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) conducted the 2008 public hearing on March 5. The public hearing was held statewide, with Met Net sites at Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell, Miles City, Missoula and Warm Springs. Seventy-five individuals attended the hearing, and 5 written comments were received.

The comments received help both programs evaluate their service delivery systems, and help develop our state and strategic plans for the coming year.

The following captures the comments received from the members of the public and MVR's and SILC's response to those comments. While in some instances the comments are not verbatim, we hope that they capture the essence of the comment. MVR & SILC would like to express their appreciation to those who took the time to provide comment, either in person or in writing.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Both MVR and Independent Living (IL): There were 12 comments requesting that MVR/IL support the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG). All 12 comments specifically requested support of the Medicaid buy-in component of the grant. One commenter requested that "it would be necessary and very helpful for a representative of the state MVR office to attend every MIG coalition activity and meeting."

MVR Response: The state was awarded a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant in January 2006. This grant funds activities to determine the feasibility of starting a Medicaid buy-in program in Montana and sets up the mechanism to implement the program. Medicaid buy-in allows workers with disabilities to pay a monthly premium for Medicaid insurance.

Grant activities in the past year include:

- Contracted with Alan Jensen, George Washington University Medical School for a cost/benefit analysis of a Montana Medicaid buy-in
- Contracted with Health and Disability Advocates for eight Social Security Work Incentives Workshops in Montana. Workshops were

held in Bozeman, Butte, Great Falls, Kalispell, Billings, Miles City, Fort Peck, and Havre with over 200 participants

- Developed a Native American survey with Mavis Young Bear, Fort Belknap and Dr. Nate St. Pierre, Rocky Boy's Reservation.
- Established contracts with five Reservations for work incentive and other work-related projects – Fort Belknap, Rocky Boy's, Confederated Tribes of the Salish Kootenai, Crow Agency, and Blackfeet Manpower
- As requested by the Governor's Office, participated in the Montana Transition Task Force
- Arranged for work incentive certification training for twelve Native Americans from five Reservations
- Planned and coordinated a second annual empowerment conference for Native Americans
- Continue to seek input from Allen Jensen, DPHHS administrators and staff, Governor's Office, MIG taskforce members and other disability groups on the Medicaid buy-in

To implement the Medicaid buy-in program, the state will need to get approval from the 2009 Legislature. MVR supports the Medicaid buy-in program and hopes that it can be implemented after the next Legislature.

MVR will take into consideration the request of having an MVR representative at future MIG coalition meetings.

IL Response: The Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), through its Legislative/Advocacy Committee, has developed a task force on Medicaid issues, including Medicaid buy-in. The task force has recommended implementation of the buy-in and the task force would like to have input on the details of Montana's buy-in. The SILC supports the recommendations of the task force.

Improve transition services to youth with disabilities from high school to adult life (five comments).

Response: MVR continues to work to improve its transitions services to youth with disabilities. In July of 2007 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between MVR and the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) calling for continued collaboration between these two entities on behalf of transitioning youth. MVR continues to maintain a "contact list" between the

school system and MVR offices, which is readily available on our website. Every high school in Montana is assigned an MVR counselor liaison. MVR will again have staff attend all days of the Montana Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF) this year, in addition to sponsoring delegates. MVR participates in a number of groups dedicated to the advancement of "transitions" services and is an active member of the Governor's Transitions Council.

However, what we are currently most excited about is the new position MVR has created in the Missoula Region, that of transitions counselor. This counselor schedules office hours at the high schools and is available to offer consultation to special education and 504 coordinators, teachers, school administration, parents, advocacy groups and others regarding the role of MVR in transition. The MVR transition counselor will meet with staff and other interested parties in other school districts to share best practices and facilitate communication between parties.

Lastly, MVR is collaborating with MYLF and OPI to host a Transitions Training Conference in September of this year---catering to students, parents, and professionals.

Secure funding through the EPP process of \$100,000 to create a full-time position through the Montana Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF).

Response: MVR requested \$100,000 per year for the next biennium to hire a statewide transitions coordinator, coordinate the state transition conference, maintain the transitions website, facilitate the Governor's Task Force on Transitions and coordinate Disability Mentoring Day. This EPP request was submitted to the Department of Public Health and Human Services director who now must prioritize all the department requests. The department's prioritized list will then be sent to the Governor's office for possible inclusion in the official Governor's budget.

Too bad that none of the service area authority and the voc rehab people have gotten together to right the problems of the mentally ill. I'd like to see some kind of job skill training to help these folks get on their own and pay their own medical bills.

Response: MVR has an interagency cooperative agreement with the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division. This cooperative agreement has provisions that include:

- To make available the required supported employment/follow-along services from MVR's Community Rehabilitation Programs certified mental health providers. Follow-along services may be provided through Community Based Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Support, and through Case Management services.
- To serve persons identified as eligible for mental health service under Medicaid or the Mental Health Service Plan.
- To strengthen supported employment services to Montana citizens eligible for vocational rehabilitation supported employment services and for community mental health services funded by the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division.
- To provide cross-training and technical assistance between our agencies.
- To establish and evaluate annual goals for our interagency work towards coordinated vocational and support services.

In addition, MVR has certified five community mental health providers across the state to provide job assistance and supported employment services to consumers with a significant mental illness.

During last year's public hearing as well as this year's, I expressed concern over both the MVR and the IL state plans with regard to their designation as a "combined agency plan." This significant error needs to be corrected with a signature placed in the designated area on both the MVR and IL Plans.

Response: This issue will be referred for review to the DPHHS attorney and to the federal review team that will be in Montana the week of April 28.

I would like to see more state jobs for the disabled, because the state jobs usually have insurance benefits that would also support the disabled joining the work force.

State government does currently employ individuals with disabilities, although MVR agrees that the number of individuals with disabilities employed could be greater. Eligible individuals with a disability can obtain preference in hiring through The Persons with Disabilities Public Employment Preference Act. This information will be kept confidential and will only be used during the hiring process to apply employment preference. The forms are available through your local MVR Office.

We (community rehabilitation programs) are very appreciative of the 1.85% provider rate increase we received through the legislative session. We are encouraging another provider rate increase as well in this next session to address the Extended Employment (EE) waiting list.

Response: MVR has requested that the Department consider the following in the Executive Planning Process:

- 2% rate increase for providers
- Funding to serve 50 individuals per year (total of 100 in two years) on the EE waiting list

This EPP request was submitted to the Department of Public Health and Human Services director who now must prioritize all the department requests. The department's prioritized list will then be sent to the Governor's office for possible inclusion in the official Governor's budget.

I would like to see a heightened emphasis on providing information to consumers on Social Security Work Incentives.

Response: MVR has made a concerted effort in the past year to provide Social Security work incentive information to consumers. Each region now has a list of the qualified benefits planners, and information/referral is provided to all consumers that are recipients of SSI/SSDI.

I would encourage as much engagement in work related activities at Warm Springs State Hospital: make sure that people walk out with at least the names and numbers of references, or if possible, a short reference letter.

Response: MVR will forward this comment to MSH. The MVR office in Warm Springs will provide social workers at the hospital a list of the state-wide MVR offices which will include contact information for each office.

I was wondering if you have the statistics for the number of Indian people who are served by MVR and the IL Centers.

MVR Response: MVR served 156 Native Americans in Federal Fiscal Year 2007 (served: in an Individualized Plan of Employment). This is 11% of all consumers that were served in State Fiscal Year 2007. MVR recognizes the need to increase services for Native Americans who live on

the Reservation, as well as those Native Americans who live off of the Reservation.

MVR has identified and will address the following goals in the 2008 State Plan:

- Work with Tribal VR (121s) to determine needs and alignment with VR. Contact the 121s and ask for input regarding the needs on their respective Reservations.
- Maintain joint training with 121 projects. Continue to notify the 121 projects about training opportunities such as All Staff, MAR conference, CTAT training opportunities, etc. Send the 121 projects any updated information on the MVR counselor manual.
- Continue good relationships with all the 121s. Visit each Reservation with a 121 project when invited.
- Provide technical assistance to the 121s when requested.
- Continue participation on federal benefits workshops on Reservations. Attend at least two federal benefits workshops per year on Reservations.

In order to ensure that MVR is meeting the needs of Native Americans that do not live on or near the reservation, in the past year MVR staff has met with:

- Great Falls Indian Family Health Center
- Helena Indian Health Services
- Butte North American Indian Alliance
- Butte North American Indian Alliance Youth Program

IL Response: For evaluation purposes, IL used a target rate of 15% because the rate of disability in the Native Americans is much higher than the general population. Please note that the IL community recognizes that Native Americans see the need for increased services in their population. At this time it appears that the Centers are serving Native Americans at a comparable rate to the general population of Montanans with disabilities, the unfortunate reality is that there is a need for increased IL services for all Montanans with disabilities.

Native American (% of IL cases served by Montana Centers for Independent Living):

- 2004 17.0%

- 2005 18.6%
- 2006 17.8%
- 2007 18.1%

Would it be possible to get MVR and IL staff to give presentations regarding their programs to the patients at Warm Springs State Hospital? Could they possible do this quarterly or once every six months?

MVR Response: MVR has an office at the Montana State Hospital (MSH). The MVR counselor at the MSH campus will meet with MSH social workers to discuss coordinating monthly or bi-monthly presentations to those individuals who are getting ready to return to their communities.

IL Response: The SILC and IL Program Manager do not provide direct services and it would be more appropriate for CIL personnel serving the area to make such presentations as they are more aware of specific services available and would be responsible for arranging the services. The recommendation will be forwarded to Montana Independent Living Project which serves the Warm Springs area.

I wonder if it would be possible for MVR to use some of their funding to help fund jobs/job training at Montana State Hospital (MSH).

Response: MSH has a Rehabilitation Department and a vocational specialist on staff. There are many vocational opportunities for patients at MSH, including working in food services, the wood shop, the carpentry shop, a fishing position in the summer, and housekeeping, which are all paid positions. The vocational specialist assists patients with resume development, internet searches for employment related information, and life skills as related to employment and returning to the community. In addition, the MVR counselor that serves MSH will coordinate with the MSH vocational specialist for those patients that are close to being discharged into the community.

I visited the DPHHS website and could not find a public notification that the hearing was being held. I am calling to your attention that state law as well as federal law require public notification (2-3-301).

Response: The public hearing dates were not included on the MVR website, and MVR regrets the error. It will be posted next year on the

website. MVR did send a "Save the Date" notice to the Friends of Rehab list on 12/13/07, and formal notification of the hearing to the Friends of Rehab list on 1/29/08.

The Friends of Rehab list consists of 168 individuals/ programs and in part includes: community rehabilitation programs, Tribal 121 Projects, MVR Council members, Mental Health centers, Montana Advocacy Program, the Governor's Office, Montana Association for the Blind, Montana Association for the Deaf, Montana Association for Rehabilitation, Montana Independent Living Centers and SILC members, Parents Lets Unite for Kids, Workforce Department of Labor and Industry, Office of Public Instruction, Montana Center on Disabilities, Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities as well as numerous individuals who have asked to be placed on this mailing list.

I am requesting that MVR make available how Social Security reimbursement funds that have been earned for the past three years be disclosed in terms of amounts received and how they were spent and allocated.

Response:

Federal Fiscal Year 2005 Social Security Reimbursement funds:

MVR received \$400,951 in Social Security Reimbursements for qualifying MVR consumer cases. \$380,917 was spent on MVR direct benefit expenses. \$20,000 was contracted to Independent Living Centers to pay their administrative costs (salaries, travel, etc) in order to provide benefits to independent living consumers. \$34 was used to cover additional independent living costs of providing benefits to independent living consumers.

Federal Fiscal Year 2006 Social Security Reimbursement funds:

MVR received \$576,650 in Social Security Reimbursements for qualifying MVR consumer cases. \$151,201 was spent on MVR direct benefit expenses. \$399,989 was spent on MVR costs of providing expenses (primarily counselor salaries). \$20,000 was contracted to Independent Living Centers to pay their administrative costs (salaries, travel, etc) in order to provide benefits to independent living consumers. \$5,460 was spent to cover additional independent living costs of providing benefits to independent living consumers.

Federal Fiscal Year 2007 Social Security Reimbursement funds:

MVR received \$460,515 in Social Security Reimbursements for qualifying MVR consumer cases. \$20,000 is contracted to Independent Living Centers to pay their administrative costs (salaries, travel, etc) in order to provide benefits to independent living consumers. \$440,515 is allocated for MVR direct benefit expenses. Neither of these amounts have been paid out in full yet but are budgeted and will be spent on expenses that occur by 9/30/08.

Social Security is an integral part of the MVR budget. If Social Security funds are reduced, MVR services will also need to be reduced.

BLIND AND LOW VISION SERVICES (BLVS)

There is a lack of support in informing visually impaired/blind clients of possible efficient accommodations that could be used in a college type environment.

Response: This will be a training topic during one of the BLVS counselor teleconferences or at the counselor breakout for the bi-annual staff meetings. The counselors can discuss how to address self-advocacy for visually impaired/blind individuals in the post-secondary environment and the types of accommodations which may be available. The University of Montana Disability Student Services Office does a workshop during the summer for students with disabilities and one method to address the issue might be sending potential college students to the training. This would also be a good topic for a presentation at a transitions conference where students and parents can learn what is needed after high school.

BLVS TECHNOLOGY ISSUES

Vision rehabilitation therapists from all the offices don't seem to have much information to share to assist one another in increasing each other's knowledge so that they can teach clients to become efficient in the use of assistive technology.

BLVS should try much harder to become familiar enough with the products available to provide information beyond what the client can

get off the manufacturer's website, so that clients can truly make an informed choice.

The BLVS website should be improved to make it a place where clients could go to for useful information about technical equipment choices and use.

Response: The specialized technology is continually changing. BLVS has a technology specialist whose job it is to keep up with current and changing technology. His job includes providing training to staff on the technology available and the basic skills for orienting a person to the technology and basic instructions for using the technology. Workshops will be scheduled to provide training to consumers and staff both on the basic and advanced use of adaptive devices or programs. Also, BLVS is identifying private resources where training in the use of software can be purchased for consumers. Vision rehabilitation therapists share their expertise through monthly teleconferences, staff meetings and if requested traveling to meet with each other.

With the rate that technology changes, rather than adding information to the MVR/BLVS website about technology which would be difficult to keep current, putting a couple of links to national resource sites on technology would be more effective. Both the American Foundation for the Blind and the National Federation for the Blind have specific sections on technology which are updated regularly and include consumer input.

An accommodations list should be posted on the website that explains what has or has not worked to achieve tasks in college and job sites.

Response: It would be overwhelming to list and maintain all the accommodations for tasks in college and at job sites which would be in the thousands considering the number of different jobs. This again can be better accomplished by listing links to national sites like the Job Accommodation Network and the American Foundation for the Blind where employed individuals contribute and are also available in several career areas to provide information.

MONTANA BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM

Montana operates the Business Enterprise Program for the Blind (BEP) which operates the services strategy via a contract with

Montana Business Enterprise, Inc. I have concerns regarding the funding levels made available for this service strategy which significantly under fund and jeopardize a reasonable service strategy. This should be a sole source contract and I recommend that the Social Security reimbursement funds earned by MVR/BLVS be used to adequately fund the administration and vending machine acquisition needed by Montana's blind vendors.

It is my understanding the BEP has developed a contract with the US Post Office in which the BEP pays a 14% commission to the US Post Office to continue its permit allowing blind vendors with the BEP to conduct vending activities on US postal sites in Montana. I find this practice highly suspect, and it needs the attention of the State Agency for the Blind as an advocate. I believe it is a responsibility of the state licensing agency (SLA). I recommend the SLA consult with the Montana Civil Rights organization for assistance.

Response: BLVS is aware of the deficiencies in Montana's Business Enterprise Program. We are researching how to effectively use the current resources to maintain the integrity of the program and both bring existing routes or sites to a level where the vendors have the opportunity earn a decent income and to develop viable routes or sites and increase the availability of funding for these goals. Additional funding for the Business Enterprise Program has been requested through the Executive Planning Process for the next legislative session.

Given the funds available for the program, the choice was made to pay the commission under protest until such time as sufficient resources are available to challenge the commission paid to the Post Office Employee Fund. This is a national issue which the RSA Business Enterprise Program staff is aware of as well.

SERVICE TO TARGET GROUPS

I recommend that consideration be given to using the service-to-target group authority in future planning and support for Montana Low Vision Services. Currently, resources from the Older Blind Program are being allocated to BLVS which supports low vision services for a broad range of groups. Since low vision is a broad age range consideration, using this authority and either 110 funds, state funds, or Social Security resources may prove to serve Montanans with low vision more adequately.

I recommend that consideration be given to using the service-to-target group authority in future planning and support for the Montana Low Vision Services.

Response: When planning the budgets for the next fiscal year, consideration will be given to using the service-to-target group authority for either direct grant or in-kind options. There is no guarantee that the capacity within the budget exists to contribute to Low Vision Montana

DISTINCT DIVISION FOR THE BLIND

I want to reinforce the MABs commitment to a distinct division for blind and low vision services providing rehabilitation services to blind Montanans.

Response: BLVS is aware of the Montana Association for the Blind's commitment for a distinct division. The current administration has a strong commitment to maintain BLVS as a separate entity within the division. The MAB is encouraged to develop their goal through a process of developing funding sources beyond vocational rehabilitation in order that services through a separate entity be available for all individuals with blindness or low vision, including those who do not meet the eligibility criteria for vocational rehabilitation or the Older Blind Program.

INDEPENDENT LIVING (IL)

Fund the IL Plan

Response: At the current time, the state plans to meet its commitments of general funds and Part B match to the IL Plan, unfortunately the federal government is decreasing the funds that were anticipated in Part B and Part C dollars and that likely will decrease the overall funding that was projected in the SPIL and may create the need in adjustments to funding described in the SPIL.

Request funding for the Centers for Independent Living (CIL) in the Executive Planning Process (EPP) (4 comments)

Response: The SILC, through its Legislative/Advocacy Committee, has developed a task force on CILs funding. The task force is recommending that general funds for the CILs be increased by \$200,000 for the biennium (\$100,000 per year) and an additional 60 consumers would be served over

the biennium (30 per year). This increase would equalize funding for the CILs and provide an additional increase for all CILs. This would meet the first priority for new funding in the current SPIL. The SILC supports the recommendations of the task force.

Request funding for MYLF in the EPP (2 comments):

MYLF funding is now part of the base budget and should remain part of the overall Division and Department budget unless there is a need for significant revisions that are not anticipated.

Improve transition services for our youth (5 comments)

Response: The SILC, through its Legislative/Advocacy Committee, has developed a task force on youth/transition issues. The task force has recommended a request of \$100,000 a year for each year of the upcoming biennium to support a variety of transition systems change efforts. Activities would include a Montana transitions website, an annual conference on transition, supporting disability mentoring day, and others. The SILC supports the recommendations of the task force.

Advance legislation regarding teaching history of disability (disability education for all) (3 comments)

Response: The SILC, through its Legislative/Advocacy Committee, has developed a task force on youth/transition issues. The task force has recommended legislation to require education related to disability culture and history in the school system. The SILC supports the recommendations of the task force.

Increase transportation options (3 comments)

Response: The SILC, through its Legislative/Advocacy Committee, has developed a task force on transportation issues. The task force has recommended strengthening of the local transportation advisory committees (TACs). This would involve an EPP request for 4.5 million dollars. The request would also provide some funding for transportation resources. The SILC supports the recommendations of the task force.

Provide access to lower income housing (5 comments)

Response: The SILC, through its Legislative/Advocacy Committee, has developed a task force on housing issues. The task force has not brought forth specific recommendations for the SILC to support at this time. However, the SILC still recognizes this as a priority issue and expects to have specific recommendations and strategies in the near future.

Ensure adequate wages and “dignity” for Personal Care attendants (PCAs)

Response: The SILC, through its Legislative/Advocacy Committee, has developed a task force on personal care issues. The task force’s recommendation on the insurance issue focused on advocating for a larger pool of coverage to insure that smaller groups of providers can obtain affordable rates. On the issue of wage increases, the task force believes that improvement had been made in the last legislature and there may be higher priorities in the upcoming legislature. The task force has received consumer input on the issue of personal care issues. This input indicated a need to restore cuts in services that were made during past legislatures. One example was that only three baths per week are now approved. The SILC supports the recommendations of the task force.

Increase the level of collaboration between MVR & IL, although it has improved.

Response: The SILC is pleased to hear that there is improvement in collaboration between MVR and IL. The SILC has a representative on the State Vocational Rehabilitation Council and has a representative from Disability Services Division on the SILC. The SILC will consider any recommendations that these members may make regarding improving collaboration. The SILC and the State Vocational Rehabilitation Council will have a joint meeting in May and the SILC will be interested to hear if the Vocational Rehabilitation Council has input on IL collaboration with MVR.

We have not been receiving adequate IL services on the Reservation. Reservations are unserved or underserved. This has been ongoing for years.

Response: The IL community recognizes that Native Americans see the need for increased services in their population. At this time it appears that the Centers for Independent Living are serving Native Americans at a comparable rate to the general population of Montanans with disabilities,

the unfortunate reality is that there is a need for increased IL services for all Montanans with disabilities. While data is not specific to Reservations, the counties associated with Reservations show high rates of services delivered to Native Americans. The current State Plan for Independent Living recognizes Native Americans with disabilities as an unserved/underserved population and has a number of objectives to address the issue for Native Americans with disabilities residing both on and off the reservation. In addition to these objectives the Unserved/Underserved Committee has met since the public hearing and has made the following recommendations:

- Invite Section 121 Directors to SILC meetings to discuss their issues. In most cases the CIL Director will also be in attendance to open dialogue. The Unserved/Underserved Committee Chair will contact individual 121 Directors regarding attendance and it is hoped that individual Directors can come to meetings in the next few years and discuss the situations on their reservation.
- The Chair of the Unserved/underserved Committee will offer to assist the Director of NCILS to work on developing a model cooperative agreement between CILs and Section 121 projects.
- Orientation materials related to Native American culture will be presented to SILC members.

NCILS reports the following outcomes of a new initiative on the Fort Belknap Reservation:

- There are currently have 6 consumers who are interested in attending the Living Well classes. In addition, others are signed up for a total of 9 consumers. Appointments are scheduled for a possible 2 more consumers.
- Furthermore, staff have met with several individuals and passed out information with different agencies such as 477 Employment and Training, Social Services, MVR, detention offices, and the Tribal Court offices.

Improve funding for IL – for Native Americans on and off the reservation.

Response: If funding is increased for CILs (see comments above) it will help to increase IL services to Native Americans as well as other areas served.

Develop a definition of “Agreed Upon Procedure” audit (AUP) and place it in the IL State Plan to ensure that agreed upon procedure audits are conducted and not “full financial audits” .

Response: The Designated State Unit (DSU) is aware that the efficient use of funds is a key concern related to this issue. The DSU will continue to review the process to make the reviews as efficient as possible, while maintaining the integrity of meeting the agency’s contract compliance monitoring responsibility.

A number of individuals thanked Montana Vocational Rehabilitation and the Independent Living Program for their support:

“As a client of MVR, I understand the limits that are imposed due to financial fiscal policies. I am happy with the services that I have received and would like to comment on the sincerity and integrity of my MVR counselor. He has gone far above what I would have considered great customer service. He not only helped myself, but also worked with my wife, using a team approach through counseling and addressing my disabilities.”

“I have been through some barriers this past year and I’d really like to thank the Billings MVR office.”

“I would like to thank MVR in their joint effort with the Rural Institute and Department of Public Health and Human Services in the Working Well with People with Disabilities project.

“We appreciate all that MVR has done in partnerships with a number of agencies across the state over the past 15 months. Without those partnerships we wouldn’t have the funds for the Transitions Conference this fall, nor would we have a website that will go up this spring.”

“I just want to comment on the increased level of collaboration between MVR and IL here in Kalispell. I know this has been a goal for a long time and it has really improved. I see a better flow of services to consumers with the close collaboration between MVR and IL.”

“I want to really acknowledge the tremendous capacity that the Centers for Independent Living have in doing outreach to the disability community and what that has meant for channeling important public health information to those populations. I really think that communication is improving.”

The MVR/IL public hearing is a forum for people with disabilities to “have a voice” regarding services. If there are further questions or concerns, you can contact MVR/ IL directly at 444-2590 or 1-877-296-1197.